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ITALY'S ATTITUDE TOWARD HER EMIGRANTS.

BY DR. GUSTAVO TOSTI, ACTING CONSUL-GENERAL OF ITALY IN
NEW YORK.

I.

THE recently published report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration has given renewed impetus to the discussion, which has of late engaged public attention, of the question how to deal with foreign immigration. It may be fairly assumed that Mr. Sargent's report will, by its general trend and through certain statements it contains, afford a strong argument to those who still advocate a restrictive policy, in order to lessen the evils resulting to this country from the constant influx of certain specific foreign elements, which seem particularly obnoxious to the cultivated American of the day. I do not propose, nor have I any authority, to enter into the general discussion of the immigration problem. That is a question which concerns the American nation, and it would be entirely out of my province to express any opinion on the subject, in my official capacity as representative of the Italian Government in New York City. But there is one important aspect of Mr. Sargent's remarkable argument which seems properly to call for a word of explanation on my part. I refer to the chapters on "Inducements to Immigration" and "Naturalization and Distribution," on pages 43 and 44 of the report. Mr. Sargent contends (p. 44) that "one at least of the reasons for the existence of alien colonies in the United States," which is "the cause of the chief dangers to be apprehended from the enormous immigration of aliens," is that certain foreign governments are actively engaged in trying (p. 43):

"to colonize their subjects who come to this country for the purpose of maintaining in them a love of their mother country. This was accomplished through agents of the home government and church sent here to

keep them from imbibing a knowledge of, and affection for, the institutions of the United States, which might, and probably would, result in their purchase of homes here and final expatriation from their own country. That result meant a permanent loss to those countries of the allegiance and usefulness of such of their subjects as adopt our views and become American citizens, as well as loss of the enormous aggregate revenue sent back annually by those who cherish the intent of ultimately returning, buying homes and living on the proceeds of their savings."

He says further on (p. 45):

"Those foreign countries where the labors of the ever-active transportation agent have been most effective in diminishing native population have become alarmed, and have made futile attempts to check an exodus which threatens to seriously impair their self-supporting capacity. Failing in this, they have taken the next possible step, that of minimizing the evil, and, if possible, of turning it to their advantage in the long run. Hence all the political and social, and occasionally the religious, resources of these countries are being directed to one end—to *maintain colonies of their own people in this country*, instructing them through various channels to maintain their allegiance to the countries of their birth, to transmit their earnings here to the fatherland for the purchase of ultimate homes there, and *to avoid all intercourse with the people of this country that would tend to the permanent adoption of American ideals.*"*

These charges, as an able student of the problem remarks, "are serious indeed and cannot be too plainly substantiated, if made at all."† As to the countries concerned, we are logically brought to the conclusion that they are two: Austria-Hungary and Italy. In fact, as the same critic remarks, "the countries of north-western Europe are not in question, as immigration from them is light, and there are no dense colonies of their people to hold together. Russia is so situated toward her immigration that she could not, if she would, influence them sufficiently to hold them in colonies. There are left then, Austria-Hungary and Italy."

An additional proof that Italy is really involved in Mr. Sargent's charges is that, on page 45 of his interesting report, he mentions, among the evils resulting from the tremendous increase and racial character of foreign immigration, "the introduction into this free country of such hideous and terrifying fruits of long-continued oppression as the mafia, the vendetta, black

* The italics are mine.—G. T.

† Kate Holladay Claghorn, "Immigration for 1904," in "Charities," February 4th, 1905, p. 455.

hand. . . ." This reference to the mafia, etc., obviously suffices to show that the Italian Government is one of those which, in the mind of the Commissioner-General, pursue the line of policy deprecated by him.

II.

First of all, it behooves us to correct an erroneous impression, which seems to dominate in certain quarters, as to the scope and meaning of the Italian Emigration Law, of January 31st, 1901. There is no provision in that law which might, with any fairness, be construed as an attempt to exploit emigration by turning it to the advantage of the mother country. The law accepts the fact of emigration as something determined by causes which are deeply rooted in the social and economic conditions of the country, and which are entirely beyond the reach of empirical measures, directed to favor or to restrict the exodus. The law merely proposes to solve a problem which is specifically forced upon the Italian Government, *i. e.*, the problem of insuring the most efficient protection to the emigrant against all possible wrongs and abuses. It is primarily and fundamentally a *social* law, that is, a law destined to serve the ends of *social* justice by affording an instrument of defence to those classes which are unable to protect themselves against the various forms of social parasitism.

That it never was the intention of the law to favor emigration is conclusively shown by Section 17, through which "Carriers"—*i. e.* Steamship Companies and their representatives—"are forbidden to persuade people to emigrate." The same section of the law specifically recalls a provision of the Penal Code by which inducement to emigration, based on the circulation of news and statements concerning alleged conditions abroad, is considered a misdemeanor and punished accordingly. This section of the law is supplemented by Section 31, by which a fine of 1,000 lire is imposed upon the Carrier (Steamship Company) who "shall introduce between himself and the emigrant any middleman who shall not be his own representative." The same penalty is by the same section of the law imposed upon the "Carrier," or his representative, "who shall pass off as spontaneous emigrants, having paid their own passage, any parties who shall in fact travel at the expense, total or partial, of any foreign government or private enterprise," such fine to be increased to 2,000 lire in case of recurrence. It is clear that the law has aimed at elimi-

nating the possibility of any artificial attempt to favor or facilitate emigration. Under the above-mentioned provisions of our law, it is difficult to conceive the possibility of the abuses denounced in the report of the Commissioner-General, through which "violations of our [American] laws, particularly of those that are directed against aliens under agreement to work here, continuously occur" (p. 43). The business of inducing emigration to this or to any other country is considered an illegal one in Italy; and, therefore, the statement that "certain foreign countries are actively engaged in it" cannot possibly apply to Italy.

The above-mentioned provisions against any form of soliciting in connection with emigration are completed by others concerning the emigration of women and children. Section 2 forbids the emigration of children under fifteen years of age, unless they have undergone a medical examination and have been granted a special permission by the local authorities, in accordance with the provisions of the Children's Employment Act. Section 3 punishes with imprisonment at hard labor up to six months, and a fine from 100 to 500 lire, "any one who shall enlist, or receive in his care in the kingdom, one or more children under fifteen years of age, with a view to employing them abroad," in unhealthy and harmful occupations. The same penalty applies to those "who send abroad, or deliver to third parties to be taken abroad, children under fifteen years of age with a view to employing them as above." In such cases, the father or guardian shall be deprived of his powers. The same penalties apply to "any one who shall induce a woman not of age to emigrate with a view to prostituting her." That the law never aimed at facilitating the dumping of paupers in foreign countries is proven by section 25, by which provision is made for the return home of indigent Italians, at the expense of the Steamship Companies, and at the rate of 10 adults per 1,000 tons register, and one for every further 200 tons or fractional 200 tons above 1,000.

But, apart from the above considerations, the mere reading of the headings of the law suffices to show that its sole aim is to assist the emigrant during the voyage, and see that he be well taken care of by the Steamship Company.

Previous to the passing of our law, emigrants were piled up like cattle in unsanitary conditions, on board of steamers which very often left much to be desired in point of safety, comfort and

decency. It was our plain duty to care in that way for the hundreds of thousands of our countrymen who go abroad to work. The following is the list of the Chapters of the By-Laws issued for the enforcement of the Emigration Act:

Part I.—Emigration in general.

Part II.—The Emigration Service.

Part III.—Carriers and Emigrants.

Part IV.—Transportation of Emigrants.

- 1.—Seaworthiness, speed and equipment of emigrant steamers.
- 2.—Internal organization of steamers.
- 3.—Sanitary service on board.
- 4.—Supply and distribution of victuals.
- 5.—Examination of steamers.
- 6.—Examination of emigrants previous to their sailing.
- 7.—Supervision on board.
- 8.—Special provisions.

Part V.—Emigration fund.

Part VI.—General provisions for the enforcement of the Law.

This shows plainly that, aside from a few sections, dealing with the general question of emigration or with the organization of the emigration service, the bulk of the regulations concerns the condition of emigrants during their voyage.

III.

Mr. Sargent calls attention to the congestion of emigrants in the cities and the existence of alien colonies, which are by him assumed to be largely due to the action of the foreign Governments concerned. As to Italy, it suffices to recall that, as far back as December, 1901—that is, at the time when the great influx of Italian immigration was beginning to take place—I published a paper, in the “Monthly Bulletin” of the Italian Chamber of Commerce of New York, calling attention to the dangers resulting from the overcrowding of our immigrants in the city tenements under unhealthy surroundings. In that article, I advocated strongly the formation of a powerful Land Corporation for the purpose of favoring the agricultural distribution of our immigrants. My article was reproduced in some of the leading newspapers and magazines in Italy. It was followed in May, 1904, by another article published in the Italian number of “Charities,” over my official signature. In the latter (“The Agricultural Possibilities of Italian Immigration”), I took up again the

subject of urban congestion, emphasizing the necessity of organizing agricultural Italian colonies in the Southern States, where conditions, climatic and others, seemed to be most favorable. On December 29th last, I published a long article in one of the leading Italian newspapers of this city, "*L'Araldo Italiano*," discussing at length the same question, and again concluding in favor of a wider distribution of our immigrants in the agricultural districts. In this article, as also in a number of public speeches, delivered on various occasions, I advocated, in unmistakable terms, the Americanization of our immigrants, strongly opposing the constitution of "alien" colonies, such as those which Mr. Sargent justly deprecates. Perhaps it may not be amiss to reproduce certain statements contained in the last-named publication, which are of a nature to show exactly the trend of thought dominating the action of the official representatives of Italy in this country. I wrote in part:

"The transformation of our immigrants into owners of land is sometimes opposed on the ground that it would gradually lead to their denationalization. We are thus confronted by a sort of nationalistic obsession. . . . It is evident that the more active the participation of our immigrants in the life of their adopted country, political and otherwise, the wider will be the field of action offered them. The alien colony is bound to be hampered by unavoidable limitations in its possibilities of life and action. In a group materially separated from the country of origin, and yet kept deliberately apart from any intimate contact with the country of adoption, all the originary racial deficiencies cannot but be intensified through the action of a well-known psychological law. The colonialistic conception ends in an imitation or caricature of the type of civilization represented by the mother country. And against this form of nationalism, narrow-minded, intolerant and fanatic, we cannot protest with sufficient energy in the interest of our emigration. The conception of enforced exoticism must be replaced by that of a free and unhampered fusion of the immigrant with the indigenous element."

IV.

On the evidence thus submitted, it is difficult not to see that the efforts of the official representative of Italy in New York—that is, in the most important place of landing of our immigrants,—have been persistently and systematically directed toward the attainment of the very ends which the Commissioner-General has in view. The agricultural distribution of the newcomers, the gradual and natural disintegration of the so-called "alien"

colonies and the blending of their members with the communities in which they have established their new home, such are the corner-stones of a programme which has been asserted on every occasion and with every means at our disposal. It is hardly necessary to point out that this line of action was in perfect harmony with the general policy pursued by the Italian Government concerning the immigration problem. A most striking proof of this is afforded by the fact that, when Signor Adolfo Rossi, a member of the Italian Department of Emigration, was sent here last winter to make a thorough study of the question, the first object to which his attention was directed by his Government was the overcrowding of immigrants in the cities, and the means to favor their agricultural distribution. If the central idea of our law is to leave emigration entirely free from any attempt at artificial inflation, and merely to perform in regard to the individual emigrant certain specific duties of help and assistance, the central idea of our policy concerning the Italian emigration to this country must necessarily be to let the assimilation of our immigrants go on unhampered. By pursuing that policy, we will assist our immigration in becoming an active factor in the life of this great country.

GUSTAVO TOSTI.